Meditative Summaries of the Divine Perfections

by Venerable Leonard Lessius, S.J.

Meditative Summaries of the Divine Perfections

by Venerable Leonard Lessius, S.J.

Preface

Not a few theological students are under the impression that what is called Speculative Theology is of very little use. They pay no attention to it during their course, and when their studies are over drop it altogether. They say they want something practical; as if Speculative Theology were a barren field, and the territory they choose to cultivate productive of abundant harvests.

This is a serious error and deprives them of knowledge that is both delightful and useful. For in the first place Speculative Theology is by far the noblest and most estimable section of the science of Divinity. More than any other it deserves the name of Theology, for the reason that its purpose is the consideration and study of eternal things. Now it is assuredly better to know even a little about the perfections of God such as the mystery of the Holy Trinity, the creation and conservation of the universe, the cooperation of God with creatures, the Incarnation, the Eucharist, the vision of God, and eternal life than to possess the most exhaustive knowledge of created things, of human inventions and human institutions. They are of no use except for the present life.

Moreover Speculative Theology not only affords a great deal of consolation if we only know how to avail ourselves of its teachings, but can lift us up to the highest perfection and sublimest sanctity. Theology is not, as some imagine, merely a battleground for scholastic disputations. Its chief purpose is our spiritual good and the fashioning of our life as Christians. By the study of the Divine Perfections, the soul rises towards God, contemplates Him, admires, fears, venerates, loves and perpetually praises and blesses Him. By walking always in His presence we shape and mould our entire life according to His good pleasure, and in obedience to the least sign of His will.

Hence these sublime mysteries should frequently occupy our thoughts, and our soul should be constantly exercised in the contemplation of the wonders this study reveals. Moreover as such study supposes profound reverence and an intellectual submission we must frequently implore the divine

assistance and the light of the Holy Spirit. For without that help and illumination all our labor would be both fruitless and useless.

Besides, although all Theology teaches what is conducive to a pious and holy life, nothing draws us so powerfully away from the love of perishable things and influences our heart with the desire of what is celestial and eternal as the meditation of the divine perfections. Theology will reign in the world to come as the unchallenged queen and mistress of all the sciences. There the science that regards only what are called the practical things of the present world will cease; and it is surely of advantage for us while we are living in this world to have a foretaste of the joys of heaven. That is what Speculative Theology accomplishes. It teaches men to live here below as they will one day live in the blessed company of the angels.

Saint Denis the Areopagite exhorted his disciple Saint Timothy to practice this kind of meditation. He considered it to be the sublimest height of all wisdom and all virtue. "My dear Timothy," he says, "fix the eyes of thy soul continually on the mystical union. I mean the divine perfections. Remove thyself from the senses and intellectual operations, in fine from all sensible and intelligible things; from all that is and from all that is not in order to raise thyself in a manner one knows not how to a union, as far as the soul is capable of it, with Him who is above all things and above all knowing."

Saint Denis is here speaking of that most excellent mode of contemplation by which after considering the divine perfections most attentively, in as much as they present themselves to it as limited to a certain species and as distinct from each other, the soul rises to something more sublime and limitless, and infinitely more noble; to something which embraces not merely the divine perfections as the created mind conceives them, but the Divine Being Itself, and in *an unknown manner* unites itself to Him by contemplation and love.

Finally the knowledge of the divine perfections is the supreme and first rule of all sanctity and all perfection in the life of rational beings, both angels and men. If this knowledge is perfect, it alone suffices to acquire the supreme perfection of every virtue. "For to know Thee is perfect justice; and to know Thy Justice and Thy power is the root of immortality." (Wisdom 14) In effect the knowledge of God is the supreme and absolute

rule of perfect and consummate justice. This justice it excites in the heart, and after having excited it, augments it and after having augmented it, perfects it. These words of the Gospel of Saint John: "Now this is eternal life. That they may know Thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent," (John 17) signify nothing else than that this knowledge is the rule of all rectitude by which we are most certainly conducted to eternal life. The Apostle declares it also when he so often prays with such ardent desire and earnest supplication that the faithful should increase *in the knowledge of God*. God Himself recommends it to Abraham when He says: "Walk in My presence and be perfect" (Genesis 17) What else does He indicate and inculcate except that by an assiduous consideration of the presence of God and the divine perfections we may acquire the virtues and perfections of life. That is the reason why the saints showed so much zeal and resorted to so many devices and made so many efforts to walk continually in the presence of God.

Here also we may include the manner in which Christ acted and which He bids us to imitate: "Love your enemies," He tells us; "do good to those who hate you and be the children of your Father who is in heaven who maketh the sun to rise upon the good and the wicked, and raineth upon the just and the unjust. Be therefore perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. Be merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful." The Apostle follows the example of Christ when he exhorts the Ephesians (and in speaking to them he addresses us), to be imitators of God as most loving sons and to walk in love as Christ loved us and delivered Himself up for us.

From all this it is clear that the consideration of the divine perfections is a most excellent rule of all perfection and of all sanctity. If this is clearly kept before our minds we need no other rule.

But just as the knowledge of the presence of God and the meditation of the divine acts lead to all virtues and the perfection of life, so on the other hand ignorance of God and the habit of never considering Him at all constitute the source of every vice, of every turpitude and of every sin. As the Psalmist says: "The fool hath said in his heart: ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt and become abominable in their ways, and there is none that doeth good, not one." For who is the man, no matter how forgetful he may be of

his salvation who would not hesitate to commit a crime if he weighed attentively the displeasure it causes God, or if he thought that God was present, menacing him with the divine anger and the curse of eternal damnation!

The reason why the knowledge of God is the rule of virtue is evident. The perfection of man consists in union with God, his first beginning and his last end. Now this union originates in knowledge. It is the foundation of all union with God. As Saint Denis expresses it – the first union with God begins by the intelligence. From that follows the union of heart by hope, charity and religion. There follows also the union of all the other powers of the soul, in as much as their effective operations are directed to God, namely to His glory. The blessed inhabitants of heaven know no other law; a fact that is worthy of our serious consideration. All their affections and all their movements are formed after the sole and perfect rule of the knowledge of God. From that rule all other rules of a just and holy life derive their correctness. By that rule the doctrine and the life of Jesus Christ is shaped. From that rule emanate as from their source all the teachings and examples of the saints, and what confirms this still more, all laws and all rules are derived from the eternal law. Now the eternal law results from the Divine Essence, just as every natural law in angels and men results from their rational nature. Therefore the knowledge of the Divinity is the first and supreme rule of all perfection.

Finally to the knowledge of God we must join the knowledge of ourselves. By contrasting our imperfection and misery with the perfection and majesty of God we estimate the distance between both, and after we have dissipated the clouds of self-love we may know clearly what is to be given to God and what to ourselves. By this comparison of human baseness with divine splendor it will be easy to know what our duty to God is, and what our duty to ourselves demands. On our side is evil and imperfection; on God’s all that is good and perfect. Hence all love is due to God’s goodness, and all honor to His perfection; whereas punishment is the proper thing for our malice, as contempt is for our baseness.

We divide this work into fourteen books. We shall not follow the scholastic method, but will adopt an easier style in order that these mysteries may not

only be placed before the mind of the reader with as much splendor as possible for the enlightenment of their minds, but also that feelings of piety may be excited in their hearts and they may be filled with awe, admiration, love and joy. While avoiding scholastic subtleties we shall endeavor to explain everything by reason, by the authority of the Holy Fathers and especially by Scripture so that without much reading, what we say may furnish abundant material for meditation. For the attentive consideration of a few things illumines the mind more and touches the heart quicker than prolix reading and elaborate argumentations.

This treatise was written thirteen or fourteen years ago, except the two last books on Justice and the Last end. The work was originally undertaken at the suggestion of Father Florontini a man much given to spiritual things. When I gave him the manuscript, I was not much concerned about making the additions referred to above. Besides, other occupations were not lacking. I trust that the edition which is now brought out may enkindle in the reader the light of understanding and the fire of love.

The Infinity of God

O Lord God! Great and terrible art Thou! God of immeasurable majesty! Thou art an infinite ocean of being, of goodness and of beatitude, compassing in Thyself all being and all good; anticipating it from all eternity, possessing it before it existed; for Thou art the source of all being. Thou art the foundation of all possible things. Thou are the superessential Being of all beings, both of those that are and of those that are not. Without Thee nothing can exist either in act or in potency, or can even be conceived by any understanding. Thou art the beginning of all beings, the end of all beings, their Creator, their support, their place, their duration, their term, their order, their connection, their harmony and their consummation.

All the good that is in men and angels is in Thee, and also the good of every purpose or end of all beings, both of those that are and those that are not. In Thee reside all glory and dignity and riches and treasures; all sweetness and consolation, all joy and all beatitude. Thou art my God and my All; the God of my heart; my portion and my God for all eternity.

May all passing things be regarded by me as vile for Thy sake; may everything that regards Thee be dear to me, and Thou, My God, more dear than all. For what is all the rest when compared to Thy excellence? What is all else but a cloud and a shadow and a vain thing? All the riches and all the delights and all the glory of the world which so miserably fascinate the eyes of men are as nothing, and only prevent us from knowing and seeking our true good in Thee. As one who in sleep dreams of riches and pleasures and honors, and awakes only to discover that it was a delusion; so will it happen to those who love the world. When the slumber of this life is broken they will awaken in the light of a different world.

Let me therefore, O my God! esteem none of the things that pass. Let me esteem Thee alone, and the treasures that are hidden in Thee. They are Thyself; and those who despise the perishable things of earth, and cleave to Thee alone will enjoy Thee for ever.

Let me love Thee above all things, and serve Thee always, because Thou art infinitely better than all things and most worthy of being loved, cherished, revered, served and glorified by all creatures for all eternity.

The Immensity of God

Lord! How great Thou art and how worthy of all praise! Of Thy greatness there is no end. Thou art higher than the heavens, more extended than the ocean, more profound than the abyss. Thou fillest all, Thou encompassest all. Thou dost hold the universe as a little globe in the hollow of Thy hand. As a philosopher has well said (if indeed he understood it in a sane sense), Thou art an incomprehensible sphere whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.

Thou occupiest all the space of all the places that are within and without the world. Thou art Thyself the foundation, the site, the space of all space. Thou extendest primarily and establishest the immensity of all space and of all the intervals therein, both possible and actual, in Thy quality of the first foundation upon which all else is built. Thou extendest not only the heavens and capacious vastnesses of this world, but in a still more marvellous way. Thou extendest that space itself in which Thou hast established the world by no other span than that of Thy magnitude. That limitless magnitude is the first and the fundamental capacity and the spaciousness or the potential extension in which all other space can be, and by reason of which the boundlessness of space is imaginable by the created mind, just as Thine eternity is the first and original duration and conceivable foundation of things that endure.

Not only by the immense diffusion of Thy Being dost Thou occupy limitless space, superarching and subtending its abyss, but Thou art moreover in all beings and in all places of this universe, in each one in particular, and in whatever points of it may be designated. Thou art there present with all Thy Divine Being, altogether and entire within it. Thou art there with all Thy power. Thy wisdom. Thy goodness, and all Thy perfections; with all Thy gifts, with all Thy treasures, to adorn and render happy all Thy creatures.

Thou art hidden entire in every being, incessantly creating all things, forming them, conserving them in all the luminousness of being; else they would fall back again into their proper darkness and nothingness; and

finally. Thou drawest them to Thyself by the inclination to good that Thou hast implanted in them.

Convert my heart to Thee, from within, I implore Thee, down to the innermost depths of my being. There let the noise of all creatures die, and all the tumult of importunate thoughts cease. Let me abide in Thee; let me see Thee ever present; let me love and revere Thee; let me hear Thy voice; let me lay bare to Thee the miseries of my exile and let me find consolation in Thee. Let me never lose sight of Thy presence, O Light and Sweetness of my soul! Let me never forget Thee, but on what ever side I turn let the eyes of my soul ever fall upon Thee. Being present entirely in each place. Thou dost shed the rays of Thy presence upon all beings. For as the soul of man that cannot be seen betrays itself by the movements and acts which the body performs making us fully aware of its presence, so O Lord! do Thou who art the Supervital Life and the Superessential Being of all beings, show Thyself in a way that will be manifest in the beauty of Thy creatures which are brilliant mirrors of Thine admirable wisdom and power.

For what in effect are all creatures but a certain impression and as it were a copy of Thine eternal thought. Thou art the primordial and universal seal, and all creatures are the resulting impressions produced by that seal. Nor dost Thou impress Thyself on matter that abides and retains this signet mark after the seal is removed, but on what is as it were fluid and evanescent and tending- to nothingness. Indeed no creature can exist a single instant if Thy seal is withdrawn from it. That it may continue to exist, there is needed from Thee a continual presence and a continual impression. Thus then, O my Lord! shall I recognize Thy presence in all creatures, because Thou art hidden in each of them and givest incessantly to them their being, their rank and their beauty.

Grant me, moreover, to understand with all the saints the length and breadth and height and depth of Thy Divinity; so that having no more affection for myself, I may plunge into that infinite ocean and lose myself therein along with all that is created, thinking of nothing outside of what I meet in those depths, feeling nothing, loving nothing, seeking nothing more than to rest in Thee alone, possessing all things in Thee alone, and enjoying all good in Thee alone. For just as Thine Essence is infinite and measureless, so every

good that is in Thee is infinite and without bounds. Who can be greedy to such a point that infinite and limitless good will not satisfy him? Let me therefore seek nothing outside of Thee, and be Thou to me all things and above all things. O God of my heart! O God! who art mine inheritance for all eternity!

The Immutability of God

"To Thee O King of ages, immortal, invisible, the Only God" and my Sovereign Master "be honor and glory" (I Timothy 1; James 1) from all creatures in heaven and on earth and above all creatures, in the highest and most inaccessible light of Thy wisdom and Divinity. Thou art the author of all immortality and all stability. Thou art the adhesiveness and the bond of every creature.

It is by Thee that angelic natures and reasonable beings are immortal and indestructible. Through Thee the heavens possess their "strength as if they were of molten brass" (Job 37:18). By Thee the earth as an immobile centre, "standeth forever" (Sirach 1:4) balanced by its own weight in the midst of the universe. By Thee the indissoluble nature of the elements and of matter persist. Thou hast with Thy mighty hand imprinted beauty upon all creatures that no art can ever rob them of. Thou guardest them intrinsically with such a power and Thou communicatest to them such a potent force of cohesion that no violence can ever disintegrate or disunite them.

Thou art not only the author of immortality and stability, but Thou art, besides, the primary and supreme origin of all movement both corporeal and spiritual. For nothing visible is done in the vast commonwealth of the world that is not ordained or permitted in the invisible counsel of Thy sovereign Majesty. There is decreed the ineffable distribution of Thy gifts, recompenses, and punishments, and the apportionment of the sorrows and joys and the other vicissitudes of this life.

All the plans and arrangements of things subject to change are in Thee without change, and the origins of all things temporal are eternal in Thee. Once before all the ages Thou didst determine upon all things; once for all Thou didst speak, and by the power of that statute or ordinance Thou didst open the series of the ages and didst determine everything that in due course should come to light in its proper time and place. The order of time is in Thee without time; and there can be nothing new for Thee who from all eternity hast made all future things. Thou hast made them, I mean in Thy

predestination of them; in that decree which ordains or permits them; and in that infallible foreknowledge which sees all things as if they were present.

In Thee is the plenitude of all good, preexisting and anterior to all the ages. To it nothing can be added, and from it nothing can be taken away. Thou possessest simultaneously from the beginning all that can be added in the infinite succession of ages, and Thou canst lose nothing, because by Thine Essence, Thou hast and art everything. Thou dost not need our service; there can be to Thee no advantage in our salvation, nor can our damnation be to Thy detriment. Even if the whole world should perish. Thou nevertheless wouldst lose naught thereby and Thy glory and Thy beatitude would suffer no diminution nor be in any way impaired.

But in spite of that. Thou dost love us with an eternal and infinite love. There is nothing Thou wouldst not do to save us and make us participants in Thy beatitude. Nay, when we wandered away from Thee, Thou didst not abandon us. Thou didst call us back again in a thousand ways as a tender father who calls after his fugitive children, promising pardon, so that we might not fall into eternal misery.

O! the immense sweetness of Thy Spirit which prompts Thee to show such benignity to us, not only when we merit naught but even when we are ungrateful and rebellious; when we do not cease to offend Thee and repay with evil the infinite favors Thou bestowest upon us.

Illumine our darkness, O! Primordial Light! Remove from the eyes of our souls the foolish fascination of this world’s trifles which perverts the simple sense. Let us perceive clearly the difference between what is perishable and what is immortal, what passes and what abides, the goods of this world and those of the world to come. Let us despise the former and strive to attain and cleave to the latter. Remove from us all inconstancy of mind that we may not waver in our good resolutions, or ever abandon what we have once begun. For nothing is more harmful to spiritual advancement than that instability of soul which is never fixed and which at the slightest breath sways like a reed in the wind.

Let a ray of Thy light illumine the lofty summits of our soul, and do Thou draw our mind on high towards Thee, above the spheres of all changing

things, above all the ways of the sun and of the years, and above all created things. Enchain it to Thee by the indissoluble bond of love, so that neither death, nor life, nor poverty, nor riches, nor glory, nor ignominy, nor pleasure, nor pain, nor height, nor depth, nor the gates of hell itself, nor all the torments of the demon, may ever wrest us from Thine arms or separate us from Thee.

The Eternity of God

"Before the mountains were made or the earth, and the world was formed; from eternity unto eternity Thou art God." (Psalm 89) Thou art the Beginning and the Maker of all things. Thou art therefore before all things. Not by any necessity of Thy nature didst Thou create this universe, this vast palace with its inhabitants and its riches, so that Thou mightest have something coeternal with Thee. It is not as with the sun and its rays. It was with sovereign liberty, and as its supreme artificer, that Thou didst form the design of it and didst shape it according to Thy good pleasure. Thou art therefore more ancient than Thy work which is not six thousand years old. And how many centuries older art Thou? Nor can this question seem strange even if before the world was made there were no centuries in which Thou wert, and in which Thou wert in the enjoyment of all good. For although before the creation of the heavens and earth, there were no phases of the sun and moon which measure our days, our months and our years. and by which we know the brief space of time that our possessions last, we can not however doubt, unless we wish to dispute about words, that there were durations and spaces like our days and months and years and centuries, through which those movements could have extended and run their course if they had then existed, just as after this world has come to and end and the movements of the planets have ceased, all the duration and lapses of time will not thereby be abolished.

Let us conceive an extent of time by going back a hundred thousand centuries before the creation of the world. Thou, O my God already wert. Let us add to this many millions of centuries, and Thou wert before all that time, as great, as powerful, as wise, as happy as Thou art now. Finally let us figure in imagination a still greater and greater multitude of centuries which are ever and always receding into the past, and we shall find that Thou wert still there, more ancient than an infinity of ages and always with Thine infinite possessions and Thy sovereign beatitude.

For Thou art the foundation, the beginning and the measure of all the ages. Thine eternity precedes and dominates them all, and beneath Thee they roll onward in their course. As by Thine immensity Thou reachest forth

encompassing and containing all space, so by Thine eternity, Thou dost precede, anticipate, encompass and span the spaces and extents of time as the root and origin of all times. For beneath Thee are inaugurated all the beginnings of things, all progress that is made, all life that flows, all movements that advance, all existence that endures, all ends that are reached, and all boundaries that circumscribe.

O Eternity! Thou art the primordial and unending reunion of all that is good; the total, perfect and simultaneous possession of a life that can never grow old; the supereminently complete fruition without beginning and without end of all happiness. For Thee there is no past nor future; for Thee there is no possible augmentation nor decrease. From the altitude of Thy Now, that actual moment which embraces infinite time, Thou gatherest together all things at once. Thou boldest them all present in such wise that they cannot flee away to the past, nor arrive at any thing new in the future. Thou precedest and anticipatest all things, present, past and future, and they are already present to Thee before they can have aught of the future in their being. For although whatever was to be in the future was such from all eternity, nevertheless it would not have been so, hadst Thou not known it, and either wished or permitted it.

In Thy *Now* all things are once for all considered and decreed. In it all counsel about all things is held and concluded. No deliberation remains to be made; all have been thoroughly scrutinized and examined. What is ever to be or not to be has been defined and decided. In that *Now* we have been numbered and weighed, and all our works have been placed in the balance; in it everlasting glory or everlasting punishment is decreed for us; there we either reign with the saints in glory or burn in hell with the demons and the reprobate. The eternity of Thy foreknowledge and of Thy decree precedes and anticipates all things, and all that is to be done in time has there been already done.

O Eternity! Abyss of joy for the saints, abyss of misery and pain for sinners! For as Thou makest all things infinitely better and more desirable so Thou renderest all evil infinitely more painful and more terrible. What spirit can comprehend Thy greatness; what strength of soul sustain Thy weight? Thou crushest down all pride; Thou shatterest all hardness; Thou

curbest all rebellion; Thou terrifiest all sinners and fortifiest all the just in their tribulations by pouring out in their soul a joy that is ineffable. "For that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above measure, exceedingly an eternal weight of glory." (II Corinthians 4) For the suffering of a moment we receive good that is everlasting; for a tribulation that is light, an immense weight of glory; for earthly affliction glory in heaven. Who would prefer to endure an everlasting punishment rather than deprive himself in this life of an enjoyment that lasts only for a moment? Who would prefer earthly things which are so vile and fleeting to those of heaven which are so sublime and which endure for ever?

O Eternity! Be Thou ever present to my mind. Inhere in my innermost sense; be the rule of all my actions and of all my life; make me think of Thee so as to despise and regard as evil all that passes, be it of weal or woe; be my solace in all suffering; my help in all temptations; my light and counsel in prosperity.

To Thee who art the Beginning of all beginnings and more ancient than them all, who art the Father of the ages, the King of the centuries, the dispenser of all time, the basis of all that subsists and abides and who givest a blessed eternity at the last, be all honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

The Omnipotence of God

How adorable and tremendous is Thine Omnipotence! How it should be contemplated in the silence of religious and reverential awe! O Lord! King of the Ages! Thou canst do of Thyself whatever all Thy creatures united can do. By Thee is established and on Thee depends whatever there is of power, of strength and of energy in all things. With one word Thou hast created all things from nothing, and after having drawn them from naught Thou didst keep them in being by Thy substantific concurrence, and didst hold them as it were suspended by the hand of Thy power and didst prevent them from falling back into their original nothingness.

Before Thee the universe is like an imperceptible atom, and all the nations like a drop of dew that falls before the rising of the sun. Thou canst do and execute not only what all men and all angels can conceive in their minds, but also whatever Thine own infinite wisdom can conceive. For Thy power is equal to Thy wisdom and coextensive with it in its outpouring.

Thy wisdom is the sole rule and the sole measure of Thine omnipotence, and what other measure can a measureless power be guided by than a measure which has no limit?

Hence it follows that Thou boldest and possessest no less the things that have not actually been brought into being but also those which actually exist and which appear in their nature and species. They remained hidden in the treasure-house of Thy power and wisdom, until they heard the summons that bade them stand forth and utter the words: "Behold us ready to do Thy will."

Thou hast no need either of our praise or of our service. Didst Thou wish it. Thou wouldst have on the instant an infinity of servants who would worship Thee incomparably better than we, and give Thee praise of every kind.

Do Thou penetrate my soul with the most profound sentiments of respect and humility in presence of Thy power which is so great, since Thou canst, O my God! dispose of me and of all creatures according to Thy good

pleasure, and there is none that can say: "Why hast Thou done this?" All things are Thine and the work of Thy hands. Be always present in my thoughts, O my God! Let me ever see the hand of Thine omnipotence extended, menacing me with the lightning of eternal damnation if I am rash enough to violate Thy holy law. Give me also a serene confidence in Thee that I may fear no one but Thee, and let no creature avail to separate me from Thy love. For what are all things in Thy presence? And in what can they harm me without Thy permission? If Thou permittest that I should be afflicted by some one, deign that it may be for my salvation and a means to merit eternal life. Amen!

The Wisdom of God

Illumine my eyes O Primordial Light; dissipate the darkness of my soul O Eternal Sun. "Send forth Thy light and Thy truth"; that they may conduct me and bring me "unto Thy holy hill and into Thy tabernacles" (Psalm 42). For Thou art the origin of all light and of all intelligence. Thou art the Author of all understanding, of all reason. Without irradiation from Thee everything would remain buried in the darkness and night of ignorance. All the arts and all the sciences are but feeble rays that emanate from Thee. All the wisdom of the Angels is but a minute spark of Thine infinite light. Thou art the source of all that is beautiful and lovable, of all form and of all beauty, of all order and of all proportion, of all fitness and all agreement, of all sympathy and all aversion. Thou hast created the nature and the species of all beings, Thou hast established in the constituent elements of each its agreement and analogy, its number, and order, its measure and its mode. Thou art the primordial seal of all things. Thou dost penetrate them all by Thy purity and Thy subtility, forming them all interiorly and coordinating everything that is in each. And although "Thou reachest from end to end," (Wisdom 8) that is, from the highest heaven to the profoundest abyss, Thou enterest into all things without mingling with any. Thou art not soiled by their contact but keepest Thy splendor and purity unsullied. Infinite are the ways by which Thou descendest to Thy creatures to form or illumine them and in which Thou diffusest Thyself upon them, and yet Thou remainest in Thine unchangeable identity fixed most firmly above all created things. Innumerable are the revelations Thou hast imparted to us by the lips of Thy servants, as well as by an infinity of signs and symbols through which Thou hast manifested Thyself to the understanding of men, yet by a single and most simple thought Thou accomplishest all things.

Thou art the author and creator of everything, the model, the measure, the end of all. Not only art Thou the author of all things visible and invisible that exist and have already received from Thee the beauty with which Thou hast invested them, but Thou art also the author of those creatures which are not, but which may be created by Thine omnipotence, and they are infinitely more numerous. All of these beings Thy Thought has seen and formed in itself before the ages, and Thou keepest them in Thy presence

although Thou hast decreed never to give them existence by creation outside of Thyself. It is as with a great architect who forms in his mind many designs of a palace and who rejoices and triumphs in these plans which his imagination presents to him, although he has resolved never to reduce them to act.

All the beings which constitute the world of the possibles exist before Thee in supreme perfection and they shine from all eternity in Thy presence no less than those that Thou hast exteriorly created. They are surrounded by Thy light and appear in the order and nature assigned to each of them. Thou rejoicest and dost triumph at the sight of all these beings that Thou beholdest in Thine inaccessible light where Thou possessest them. There they cannot decay nor grow old, nor be obscured by darkness, nor fall from Thy divine hand, but they always subsist in the same immutable and eternal splendor.

O! Admirable Wisdom! To Thee all things past and future are present; to Thee all things of time are eternal; before Thee all things that are feelingless and dead are living, and all things that are not, exist. Thou embracest simultaneously all eternity. Thou exhaustest all infinity and containest all immensity. All things have within Thee an eternal being and an eternal life, without beginning or end; and they are utterly unchangeable. Each of them, indeed, has in itself, either in act or potency, its own intrinsic being; but this in created things has a beginning and is subject to change; nor does it give life to what is inanimate. But over and above this being which they have in themselves, they have in the divine wisdom and understanding something intrinsic which is, as it were, infused and which is immutable and everlasting. For the conception of things is a certain intelligible entity by which they exist in the mind, and by which they shine and live there as in a spiritual world. Thy wisdom therefore is the being and life and light of intelligible things according to the words of Saint John: "What was made in Him was life", which is the meaning given to the text by Saint Augustine and other Saints.

All things are in the Divine Essence as in their basis and primordial foundation. They are in the power of God as in their efficient cause which

has created all things; they are in His wisdom formally and objectively as in their exemplar or ideal cause.

The Infinite Wisdom first turns towards the Essence of God, and understands it perfectly, for it is equal to and commensurate with it. From that adequate comprehension of the divine essence proceeds immediately the conception or the representation of all possible things; following that conception is the distinct knowledge of whatever all actual and possible creatures can do; then comes the clear intuition of everything that can be done in all possible suppositions, and finally there is the eternal vision of all things past, present and future.

In this manner and in this order, Thy Wisdom, O Great God! proceeds, as it were, from five spheres of objects and intelligible things, and all that it conceives, it conceives by the power of the adequate comprehension of Thine infinite Essence which is the first cause and the foundation of all possible things. Thus in Thee is found not only the universality of wisdom and intelligence but also the universality of intelligible things and objects.

To Thee, then, O Plenitude of Light! Plenitude of Truth! and Infinite Wisdom of God! be honor and glory from all creatures, and above and beyond all creatures, be honor and glory in Thyself who art the clear and consummate knowledge of the divine excellence. O! Omnipotent God! Thou makest Thine excellence to shine in the understanding of the Angels and Saints, and in that splendor there is something of Thy glory. But it is infinitely more resplendent in Thy Wisdom, for infinite light is more brilliant than a feeble spark.

Let Thine own wisdom therefore give Thee infinite praise; and let every creature rejoice in it, felicitate it, praise it, bless it, glorify it. Thou hast no need of our glory or our praise; a spark adds nothing to infinite light, but we find our advantage in it, for to know Thee and to praise Thee is our greatest good. It is eternal life.

The Goodness of God

The Lord is good and most lovable. His goodness knows no bounds. Not that He is good in this manner or that, in this or that kind of good, but He is absolutely good without beginning, without end, without limit and without mode or measure. He precedes all good and comprises all good in Himself alone.

This good none has given to Thee that Thou shouldst repay it with gratitude. Thou, O simple and primordial Goodness, hast it of Thyself, and it is from Thee that all things taste the sweetness of what is good for them, according to their grade in creation. For Thou art the plenitude and universality of good, the original source of all good to whom all beings from the highest created substance down to that which is at the ultimate confines of creation are indebted for whatever good they possess.

No creature can find in its own nature all its own good. It needs many things that its nature should be complete and perfect even in its own genus and within the limits of its nature. But Thou by Thy most simple essence hast every excellence, every perfection, every beatitude, every good and Thou needest naught outside of Thyself.

The good of every creature is restricted and circumscribed within certain bounds. It does not contain within itself the good of anything else. Hence we stand in need of an infinity of things in order to live, because each thing in particular affords us but little of itself. But Thy goodness, that is to say, the good of Thy simple essence is boundless; is overflowing on all sides and supremely sufficient of itself for everything. For as Thou art the primordial source of all things there is naught that can limit or circumscribe the condition of the good that is in Thee. Hence just as Thine essence. Thy power and Thy wisdom are infinite because they are primordial, and flow from no other source, and are consequently boundless, so Thy goodness and Thy perfection are boundless because they precede all goodness and perfection and depend on nothing that might limit them. A nature that is of itself limitless cannot be subjected to any limitation except by an efficient

cause. But as the perfections which are in Thee have no efficient cause, they must necessarily know no bounds.

Woe to the wretches who seduced by the manifold kinds and inextricable multitude of baser things seek outside of Thee, with so much care, worry, labor, and peril of their salvation, the riches, pleasures and honors of this world! They can find them all in Thee in a better and easier manner, not merely as in human things for a fleeting moment but for all eternity. For all things are in Thee. In Thee they are most pure, are enjoyed simultaneously and without limit. In Thee are found in a supereminent manner the glitter of gold, the beauty of precious stones, the fruits of the fields, the delights of gardens, the magnificence of palaces, the riches of cities, the glory of kingdoms. Everything that is desirable in the world, all that is glorious and honorable and lovable are found in Thee in the highest degree, in the most perfect purity, and all in closest union for ever and ever. Moreover from them is excluded every imperfection that is found in created things.

In Thee are found all delights and pleasures, all that recreates, and all that charms, all consolations and all joys, all beauty and all felicity, all beatitude and the consummation of beatitude. It is from Thee that what is sweet derives its sweetness, what is luminous its splendor, what is living its life, what has feeling its sensation, what moves its power, what has understanding its knowledge, what is perfect its perfection and what is good its goodness.

Thou art the author, the type, the end and the preserver of all perfection. Thou terminatest all infinity; Thou goest beyond every end, Thou limitest every measure, Thou formest whatever is beautiful as well as what is lacking in beauty. But Thou art perfect of Thyself, perfect beyond all conception, perfect from all eternity; possessing in Thyself by Thy simple unity all excellence and all perfection.

Thou art great without quantity; good without quality; infinite without number; beautiful without figure; eternal without time; immense without location; diffused without extension; perfect without multiplicity; and most high without situation. Thou art the centre of the universe to which all things tend by their innate weight; in which they all rest and by which they are all sustained. In Thee are found the attraction of every love; the

consummation of every desire, the term of every movement, and the satisfaction of every appetite.

What is not the power of Thy super-eminent goodness, since at the least gleam of its rays, and even of its faintest reflection, all creatures rush towards it with impetuosity! For every being in this universe seeks its own special good and tends towards it with all its might. But that good is only a feeble vestige of Thy goodness. It is good that attracts every creature and excites every movement in the world; and all that moves, acts and works in created things, moves, acts and works only by the desire of something good. But if a faint shadow excites such power, what will not the Truth itself do? I mean infinite beauty and goodness when seen in the light of heaven.

Draw my soul to Thee, O boundless Beauty! Enchain it to Thee by an indissoluble bond and by the eternal fetters of Thy love. For what can I seek or desire outside of Thee who art the plenitude of all good, the source, the end, the sweetness of every good, and who art infinitely better and more excellent than all good? Let me therefore despise everything else, and let me ever think of Thee. Let me love Thee always; let me live intimately attached to Thee, and let me make of Thee my abiding place. Let me love Thee and bless Thee; let all the powers of my soul, and my whole life be consumed in Thy service. Let all passing things be considered vile in comparison with Thee, and let me despise them for love of Thee. Let all that is Thine be dear to me, and be Thou, O my God, dearer than all. According to Thy most exalted pleasure, perfect me in Thy knowledge and Thy love, and translate me entirely into Thee so that I may be of one spirit with Thee. Amen.

The Sanctity of God

"Holy, Holy Lord God of Sabaoth. All the earth is filled with Thy glory." (Isaiah 6) Such is the cry of the Seraphim in that mystical vision in which Thou didst show to Thy prophet Isaias something of Thy glory, and something of the terrible judgment which befell the Jews. They had filled up the measure of their iniquity, by refusing to recognize Thee when Thou didst come in the midst of them as the Word made Flesh; and now the celestial spirits demand that Thy holiness should be avenged. Three times they claim it with evident reference to the great mystery of the Trinity. For "Thine eyes are too pure to behold evil" says Habacuc (chapter 1) "and Thou canst not look upon iniquity." As Thou art Holiness itself, all sin displeases Thee supremely, and hence "Thou wilt destroy all those who work iniquity." (Psalm 5 and 27) As the darkness is contrary to the light; ugliness to beauty, foulness to purity, obliquity to rectitude, malice to goodness, death to life, so all sin is contrary to Thy sanctity and is held by Thee in horror.

Therefore just as Thou hast a sovereign love for Thy holiness, so Thou hast necessarily a sovereign hatred for sin, and Thou punishest it by an infinite penalty, unless Thy mercy prevents the sinner, inspires him with contrition and accords him pardon when he repents.

No one ever has been pleasing in Thy sight except by sanctity, and no one endowed and adorned with it has ever displeased Thee. It is sanctity alone that gives children and heirs to Thy kingdom. To it alone was the communication of Thy glory and of Thy beatitude promised and prepared before the ages. We have been "chosen by Thee before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and unspotted in Thy sight in charity" (Ephesians 1), and capable of the eternal inheritance.

Not Thy power, nor Thy wisdom nor the sublimity of Thy majesty, but Thy sanctity, didst Thou command us to imitate. Thou didst say: "Be holy as I am holy." (Leviticus 2) For it is proper that He who is the source of purity and sanctity, who is pure above all purity, holy above all holiness should have ministers who are holy and free from all taint of sin. But whence can

we have such purity that we may be worthy to enter into Thy holy presence and to employ ourselves in that which concerns Thy service? We dwell in habitations of clay and in thought and act are in constant contact with earthly things. If the celestial spirits who are exempt from all corporeal admixture and purer than the heavens, are nevertheless infinitely removed from that purity which ministering to Thee exacts, how far must we be from it who are incomparably beneath them in merit! It is in this that Thy benignity displays itself. Far from rejecting Thy servants because they are sinners and covered with the defilement of earthly things. Thou drawest them to Thee to remove their stains, to illumine their darkness, to sanctify their affections and to make them worthy to appear before Thy face, as far as the restricted capacity of their mortal nature permits. Thou dost not demand of us what is due to the exaltedness of Thy sanctity but what is proportionate to the feebleness of our nature.

Thou art the author, the end, the rule, the model of all holiness; of whom, for whom by the imitation and resemblance of whom all are sanctified in heaven and on earth. The whole universe is like a temple of Thy divinity, consecrated to Thy worship, sanctified by Thy presence, full of Thy glory, adorned with Thine admirable works. In it Thou wishest to be honored, praised and blessed by us in this life and in the life to come.

But the sanctity of rational nature is more sublime, just as Thy presence declares itself with incomparably greater splendor in spiritual than in corporeal nature. For spirits can draw near Thee and unite themselves with Thee in a more excellent manner; and to know Thee and love Thee is the holiness of spirits. By that knowledge and that love, Thou dwellest in them and they become for Thee a temple more acceptable and more august than this vast machine of the universe which is incapable of feeling Thy presence. By that knowledge and love also they approach Thee, and are bound to Thee by a living tie and they are lost in the abyss of Thy purity. For he who knows passes into Him who is known, and he who loves into Him who is loved. Hence as Thou art a most Pure Act, and if we may so express ourselves, art not only at the summit of spiritual simplicity and purity, and infinitely above material and corporeal things but because also Thou art infinitely simple, infinitely subtile and infinitely spiritual, it is necessary that he who is elevated to Thee and united to Thee and made the

same spirit with Thee, should become more simple, more pure and be ever more and more removed from the contagion of lower things. Such is the sanctity with which rational creatures and angels should be endowed to please Thee perfectly.

But O Infinitely Holy God! Thou hast found a degree of sanctification incomparably higher still when by Thyself and without any created gift Thou dost sanctify one creature by drawing it to Thee in a manner far above what Thou hast done for all others, by uniting it to Thee substantially in the Hypostatic Union. It is thus Thou hast sanctified the Most Blessed Humanity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, so that in Him, along with the plenitude of the Divinity there is found also the plenitude of sanctity.

O admirable sanctification, altogether incomprehensible for all created intelligences! O infinite condescension of the divine goodness which has opened and established for the human race such a source of expiation and holiness! It is from this fullness that we have all received, and what remains suffices to wash away the sins of a thousand worlds and to sanctify an infinite number of souls. Thus by one man all men are sanctified and led back to God, just as by one man they had been separated from God and defiled by sin.

And because we are gross, dependent on the senses, and buried in material things, Thou dost accommodate Thyself to our weakness by sanctifying us through the instrumentality of sensible things and giving us Thy Spirit and spiritual gifts by contact with what is corporeal. O admirable counsel of the eternal wisdom! From children of wrath Thou makest us children of God, heirs of eternal life, sharers in the divine glory, and Thou accomplishest this by the contact or use of sensible signs, though we deserved to be in every way confounded and condemned to eternal death. O admirable sweetness and goodness that has wrought so great and divine a thing by means of which we are made like unto God and without which we could not please Him; and all that not only by things that are so humble and by instruments so weak, without labor or effort on our part or at least with only a trifling cooperation! O true age of gold and of grace is this time of the New Testament, when earth affords us so many celestial treasures and such an abundance of divine gifts which we can gather with such astounding

facility! It is now that the heavens rain down honey and the mountains distill sweetness, and the rivers overflow with milk and wine, and vast storehouses of heavenly treasures are thrown open to mortals so that in a little time and in the easiest possible way they can enrich themselves and be equal to the angels.

Glory be to Thee, benediction and thanksgiving from every creature in heaven and on earth, O Author of all sanctity! Such a blessing can come only from Thee and Thou alone can show Thy love for man in such a manner. Thou hast given us the Saint of saints, and Thou hast made Him an eternal source of sanctification for "the cleansing of the sinner and of her that was defiled." Thou hast sanctified this Saint of saints by communicating this sanctity to Him, and through Him to all others. It is from Him that all holiness flows into the symbols or sacraments. From the sacraments it pours itself into the soul through the body; from the soul it redounds upon the body and on man’s most interior workings, and from what is interior to what is exterior. Thus the whole man is made holy and his entire life is dedicated and consecrated to Thee. He is brought back to Thee who art his beginning, and he rests in Thee who art his sovereign good and last end. It is thus Thou recallest Thy creature to Thee and makest him worthy to abide in Thee.

O God! make me draw unceasingly from that source; make me live in that fountain always and whiten my garments in the Blood of the Lamb! "Wash me yet more from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin; sprinkle me with hyssop," in this fountain of blood of the mystical sparrow and I shall be purified; lave me in that water and "I shall become whiter than the snow."

The Benignity of God

O Lord how sweet is Thy spirit and how great is Thy benignity to every creature! For though Thou lackest naught and sufficest fully for Thyself, Thou hast drawn all this universe from nothing so as to make every creature according to his capacity feel the sweetness of Thy goodness and receive the impress of Thy beauty. Not because it was advantageous or useful for Thee didst Thou do all this, but solely for the advantage of Thy creatures, in order that each according to his own little measure might participate in Thy good and taste the fruit of Thy benignity.

It is therefore by Thee that all things have been drawn from the abyss of their nothingness; it is from Thee that they receive the being which is so dear to them, and with that being, its species, its beauty, its desire of good and its aversion from evil, its powers, its functions, its inclinations, its movements, its place in the world, its order, its perfection, its end. Thou givest to each whatever is most suitable for it and what delights it most. Thou accordest to the animal world a manifold feeling which is both pleasant and good and which is a shadow, and a lower degree of felicity.

Hence all things praise Thee, and with their silent voices intone in Thine honor a sacred hymn wherein they celebrate most clearly Thy power, Thy wisdom. Thy goodness. Thy providence. For "the heavens show forth the glory of God and the firmament declareth the work of His hands. Day to day uttereth speech and night to night showeth knowledge. There are no speeches nor language where their voices are not heard. Their sound hath gone forth to all the earth and their words unto the ends of the world." (Psalm 18)

But Thy benignity shines forth, O my God! in a still more incomparable manner in our nature; for Thou hast created us to Thine image and likeness making us bear on our brow the traits of Thy countenance. Thou hast given us understanding, will and memory, to render us capable of Thy divinity. Thy glory and Thy beatitude. Thou hast showered upon us Thy divine assistance, and adorned us with grace in order to help us to merit and acquire those precious possessions. Thou hast deputed Thine angels to

defend and direct us. Finally this world with all that it has of riches or goodness, Thou hast made for our habitation and our comfort, and Thou hast delivered it over to us. Can any greater benefits or any more admirable benignity be conceived? But how our admiration redoubles when we reflect that Thou hast done all this to elevate us to a state that is divine, and to make us participants in Thy beatitude.

By Thy nature Thou possessest the most absolute plenitude of glory and happiness. But in that state Thy benignity could not contain itself. It pours itself out on all creatures to make them share in Thy good. For that reason hast Thou created angels and men who are capable of such an exalted destiny and hast drawn out of nothing all this universe with its riches for the good of man.

Did ever a monarch on this earth share his kingdom with vile and abject slaves? And yet kings and slaves are equal in nature and differ from each other only in their fortune and external things.

As for us we are not only infinitely removed from Thee by the conditions of nature, but are, moreover, in the lowest rank of intelligent creatures. Nevertheless Thou hast loved us more than all others, and Thou hast lavished on us in greater abundance than on any other creatures the riches of Thy divine bounty. It is the characteristic and bent of benignity to lower itself to what is base, to lift up what is abject, to exalt what is humble and to communicate riches and bestow them more abundantly where the need is most manifest.

"Thou art verily, O my God," as Saint Bernard says, "an omnipotent love, a most benevolent power, immutable order, eternal sweetness, creating the world to make it a participant of Thyself; vivifying it to make it feel its Creator; touching it by Thy sweet contact to make it long for Thee; dilating it to fill it with Thyself; justifying it to enable it to merit, inflaming it to make it burn with zeal; fecundating it to make it fruitful; prompting it to righteousness, forming it to benevolence, moderating it to wisdom, visiting it to bring comfort; illumining it to augment its knowledge, guarding it for immortality, encompassing it for protection." (Lib. iv. de Consid.) It is thus that Thou crownest us with Thy mercy and compassionate sweetness; it is thus that Thou fillest us and surroundest us on all sides with good things, so

as to make us recognize Thy goodness and Thy love, and to excite us to give love for love.

Thou hast resolved to lead us by love to our first beginning, to unite us to Thy goodness and Thy beauty, and to transform us into Thyself. There was no way more efficacious for this than the method of love. For love is ecstatic and unitive, that is to say, it lifts us out of ourselves and unites us to Thee. We cannot be changed into Thy nature. That would involve the destruction of our being which is a created thing. If it were destroyed we should lapse into nothingness and be incapable of all feeling and of all good; but what nature cannot do, love accomplishes. Thou lightest in us that love in a thousand ways, in order that by its fire we may be melted, or liquified and absorbed in Thee, just as a drop of water in a vat of wine assumes the color and the flavor of wine though the substance of the water remains entire. Love makes the one who loves, to be no longer himself in affection and sentiment. He is changed into the one he loves, so that no difference can be discerned between them. For by love the lover so cleaves to the beloved that as far as in him lies he strips himself of his own being to put on that of the beloved, and to be one and the same, as the object of his affections. He thinks only of the good of the beloved, desires only that and labors to augment it. Thus he can say with the Apostle: "I live, but not I. It is Christ who liveth in me." (Galatians 2) Love thus makes a man forget himself, and makes him no longer belong to himself. It causes him to die to himself and live in the object of his love. In that manner the one who attaches himself to God is made one Spirit with Him. This is the perfection and consummation of sanctity, and eternal life. It is being one with God by the force of love.

It is thus we revert to that primordial type in which we exist from all eternity, not by anything intrinsic to us, but by the force of the idea and the conception of the divine understanding which effects that from all eternity we have lived, labored, and borne the burdens of life in the mind of God although we were nothing in ourselves. Thence, because of God’s love for us we passed to our created state, as the form of an edifice passes from the mind of the architect into the condition of actual production, or as the picture passes from the imagination of the painter to his canvas. Thus are we brought back by love and when thus brought back, are united to, and

transformed into the idea which God had of us as if the picture were to penetrate the mind of the painter and unite itself intimately to the original type.

Thou comest down and enterest into us by love, to enkindle its fire in us, and by it to lift up our hearts on high and change them into Thee. For as fire by the force of its flame converts everything into itself, so Thou who art a consuming fire convertest everything into Thee by the force of Thy love so that we may think only of Thee and of what concerns Thee. Let us taste with delight and feel and desire only Thee, and let us speak of naught but Thee, Let that love make us go out of ourselves, so that we may forget all that pertains to us as if we no longer existed. Let us enter into Thee, live in Thee, abide in Thee, and find our delight in Thee. Let this love so possess us that all our life shall be for Thy glory, without fear of any danger, or the refusal of any toil. Let it change into bitterness whatever is worldly, and convert labors undertaken for Thee into sweetness. In our eyes let affronts be glory; poverty, riches; persecutions, prosperity; infamy, fame; sickness, comfort; life, death. For all the woes of this life, supported by Thy love, are better than all the goods of this world. "If we suffer with Him we shall be sharers in the Kingdom." By that love, O God! be our life, our nourishment, our dwelling, our possession, our riches, our glory, our strength, our refuge, our repose, our consolation, our protection, our assurance, our joy, our beatitude. Amen.

The Dominion of God

"I will bless Thee all my life long and in Thy name I will lift up my hands." (Psalm 62) "Thou art the King of kings and the Lord of lords." (I Timothy 6) "Thou art the Lord of all and there is none that can resist Thy majesty." (Esther 13)

All things persevere in their course in pursuance of Thy command; all creatures observe the law which Thou hast given, and each one renders Thee homage according to its capacity and power; all confess in unison that Thou art their Creator and their Master. Thou hast sovereign power over all. Thou canst dispose of all, according to Thy good pleasure, and none has the right to demand an account of Thy actions and to say: "Why hast Thou done this?" All the kings and rulers of this world with all their pomp and magnificence, with all their kingdoms and armies, with all their riches and majesty are but worms of the earth, and as nothing in Thy sight. The least of Thy servants who has the honor to serve Thee in Thy heavenly palace is greater than all kings together, and no earthly potentate is capable of supporting the majesty of the least of those who form Thy court. Everything mortal melts like wax in presence of the splendor of an angel and faints away before him. What then is the glory of Thy majesty which is infinitely greater and more excellent than that of all the angels. "Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised and of His greatness there is no end. Generation and generation shall praise Thy works and they shall declare Thy power." (Psalm 144) The kings and kingdoms of earth will suddenly fall and be reduced to naught but Thy kingdom shall endure for ever and all Thine enemies shall be under Thy feet. The kingdom of the demons and the wicked which now disturbs the world in its oppression of justice and truth shall be utterly destroyed. But Thy kingdom shall keep all under its domination and Thou shalt be all in all.

It is Thou great God! who hast created us all; we are the work of Thy hands; Thou hast shaped and moulded us as the potter his clay. All that we are, all that we have the power of doing, all that we possess, we have received from Thy bounty. It is all Thine. Thou art the maker and the deviser of all. Thou hast drawn all things from naught; from the depths of

darkness and the abyss of nothingness hast Thou taken them. Thou hast suspended them in being, in the light of Thy countenance, in order that all according to their species and forms may shine before our minds and suggest to us Thy majesty. But as by their innate propensity and of themselves they lean towards the nothingness from which they have been drawn, it is not sufficient to have once made them, but it is necessary that Thou shouldst hold them in Thy hand and incessantly support them by that same substantific influence that has produced them, in order that, at each instant they may receive the benefit which they had received when they began to be. The weight which is suspended in the air must be continually sustained. If left to itself it falls to earth in the twinkling of an eye. So all creatures in this universe need to be incessantly preserved in their being and their nature by Thine Omnipotent hand. If Thou withdrawest it, even for an instant they will fall into nothingness and perish suddenly like a shadow that passes away. There is no solidity in bodies or permanency in spirits unless it is received from Thy strength which restrains and holds them intrinsically and prevents they from flowing off like water, or scattering like smoke or vanishing as a vision or a phantom. For Thee, all things are soft and pliable; all things are like a liquid that trickles off and disappears from sight. But at the least sign of Thy will They instantly take the form and figure which it pleases Thee to give. Before Thee neither the mountains nor the rocks are solid, nor is adamant hard, nor the heavens or stars fixed. Nothing can subsist without the perpetual and vivifying influence of Thy light.

Thou art therefore the absolute Master of all things. By Thee they were all created and on Thee they depend. Thou sustainest them lest they fall, keepest them lest they change, restrainest them lest they flow away, and holdest them together lest they perish.

Thou art the deviser, the author, the worker, the preserver, the support, the exemplar and the end of all things. It is by Thee that all things exist so that they may contribute to Thy glory: rational creatures by knowing Thee, loving Thee, honoring Thee, praising Thee; irrational ones by serving for our use, and by their marvellous beauty exciting our souls to admire and to love Thee. And, although we exist only for Thee, and although what belongs to us is destined for Thy glory we are not on that account vile and

miserable; for our nature and our greatest good is to serve Thy glory. To serve Thee is to reign; to obey Thee is to go forward to heaven. To serve Thee is better than to rule the whole world. When the soul is engaged in Thy service, it is exalted, it is united to Thee and because of its closeness to Thee is illumined by Thy light and becomes like Thee. When it is engaged in ruling others it withdraws from union with Thee, descends to inferior things and dissipates itself in its quest of a multitude of things none of which avail for its advantage. Only what is above the soul makes the soul better.

It is a great delusion to make so much of empires and kingdoms, and governments, and prelacies and place, if while ruling others we neglect ourselves; if we exhaust ourselves and trample on right and justice to grasp at a shadow of happiness which shuts us off from our true good and our eternal salvation. For there is nothing that so powerfully withdraws the soul from the love of celestial things; nothing that entangles it so inextricably in those of earth; nothing that gives more unbridled license to commit sin, and exposes us to the danger of remaining in it; nothing that sweeps aside more effectually all salutary counsel; increases more the malice of sin, makes one participate more in the sins of others than do prelacies and principalities. No doubt there are some who accept these charges for other motives than ambition or earthly interests, and who desire to advance the common good and to lead a greater number of souls to salvation. Such men may expect a rich reward because of the difficulty of their undertaking and the extent of the good they procure; but it is far safer to be hidden in the lowest ranks and to be concerned about one’s salvation.

O God! grant me the grace to despise human praise, to flee worldly honors, and to live to be unknown by men. Let it suffice for me to know Thee, and to be known by Thee; to serve Thee and to prefer Thy service to all the empires of the world and all the honors and dignities they can bestow. Let that be my glory and my exaltation ; the summit of my ambition, the title and the insignia of my dignity. Let others glory in kingdoms and principalities, in nobility and riches, and whatsoever honors the world may confer. Let all my glory consist in being Thy servant; let all that belongs to me be dedicated and consecrated to Thee and ever employed in Thy service.

Let all my thoughts, all my cares, all my efforts, all my purposes tend to Thy honor and have no other end but Thy glory.

The Providence of God

O God our Father, Thy Providence governs all things; "it reaches from end to end mightily"; from the sublimest height of the heavens to the profoundest centre of the earth, from the highest seraph, to the vilest worm; and in doing so, "it disposeth all things sweetly." Most powerful is the touch of Thy hand by which all things are created and sustained; most sweet is that disposition of things, by which all things are established in their place and rank, directed to their end and given freedom in their individual actions.

It is neither by the fortuitous concurrence of atoms, nor by the violent struggle of the elements, nor by its own action that this world was formed and flashed into the light, but by the counsel and power of Thy Providence. How could a work of such vast intelligence and wondrous art, in which the sublimest intelligence is apparent, in which all is admirably regulated with such order, proportion, beauty and symmetry be performed without design and without wisdom?

Thy Providence has thought out all these things from all eternity, and has conceived, devised, developed and set them all in their respective places. It determined the species, the measure, the form, the organs, the inclinations of all creatures. It endowed them with their various forces and modes of action and panoplied them in armor for the exercise of their proper functions and defense against their foes. It assigned special ends to each, appointed separate causes for each and provided each with what was best suited to its nature.

From the beginning and before the world was all things were established in Thy Providence. In it the order of time subsists without time, nor can anything new be added to it, and all that can occur in the course of time exists in it before time began. For the power that disposes of whatever is subject to change is that unchanging and unchangeable intelligence in which things existed together before time, although in time they are separated; for time is a series of successions.

There stand the immutable causes of all mutable things; there shine the eternal plans of all that is temporal; there are planted the necessary roots of all that is contingent; there are enforced the laws that are stable, and there are determined the ends of all agents and of all actions. There by a firm, ineffaceable and irrevocable decree, engraven on tablets harder than adamant, is recorded the salvation or loss of each according to his deserts. There with their sanctions are the laws about all things; their birth, their life, their progress, their functions, their effects; all the eventualities of life and all the circumstances of death. By these decrees are determined at what time, at what moment, in what place, by what causes, in what order, and in what manner each thing is to exist in this world.

Without the laws of Thy Providence, O my God! nothing is born, nothing dies, nothing acts, nothing moves, nothing is at rest. It directs all things to their ends; it is intrinsically present to them and presides over them; it forms and gives to each its nature and by that nature leads it in its proper functions to its proper end. For what are the natural instincts and inclinations of every creature but a vestige and impress of Thy Providence? Thus it is that all irrational creatures act with such regularity and tend with such order to their respective ends of which they have neither knowledge nor feeling.

What art does not the spider display in weaving its web from its own vitals to spread a net for the flies which it pursues. With what subtlety and industry the bees build their cells! With what skill they form their hexagonal dwellings in which their young are born and which are at the same time reservoirs of the nectar they gather! With what care they sip the morning dew and suck the juice of the flowers! And how many other marvellous things they perform in that diminutive republic of their hive!

I speak not of the admirable skill of the birds in building their nests in which they find rest and safety, and where their young are hatched and fed and taught. I say nothing of the astonishing things we behold in the silk worm, or of its industry in drawing from its own body the threads which are so finely spun as to be scarcely discernible but out of which it forms the cocoon which encloses it like a tomb from which it emerges months afterwards to live again by a resurrection that is such a striking image of our own future rising from the grave.

I pass over in silence the infinite number of things which both in the animal and vegetable world seem to be done with such intelligence, art and providence that no greater perfection would appear to be possible. Yet this does not come from the skill of these creatures in providing for their needs, but it is Thy Providence, O my God! that leaves its trace and sheds its glow on them, making them act as if they were endowed with a most exalted providence and a perfect art. Thus it is that all the actions and all the works of nature are really the actions and works of Thy Wisdom and Thy Providence, and all these irrational creatures act as perfectly in conformity with the laws of Thy Providence as if they were endowed with a most perfect knowledge.

Rational creatures of course are to be excepted. They possess a certain providence of their own, and being free, refuse at times to submit to Thy Providence and desire to live according to their own providence and at the caprice of their wills. It is from that source that spring all sins and all sorrows. Nevertheless nothing occurs without Thy Providence, for though rational nature by thus sinning, ceases to act in conformity with the law which Thou hast prescribed, yet on the other hand it does not act outside of the law of Thy Providence, from which it draws the very power that it uses for its own perdition. Thou permittest it to do what it could not do without Thy leave, and Thou assignest certain limits to its action beyond which it cannot go, nor can it do more harm than what Thou permittest. Thou hast completely circumscribed it by the circle of Thy Providence from which there is no escape and which so dominates all creatures that none can throw off its yoke.

Woe to sinners who endeavor to withdraw from its government and law, and to live according to their own providence, their own pleasure, and the promptings of their free will. When they step aside from the providence which leads to life, they subject themselves to the providence which dooms them to death; when they depart from the order in which sweetness and mercy reign they descend into that of rigor and of justice; when they cast aside the sweet yoke of the divine commandments they bend their necks to the cruel slavery of the damned and of everlasting punishment. O madness that should be wept for with tears of blood! What has fascinated the minds of men to lead them to this excess of folly!

Especially are religious to be pitied who instead of abandoning themselves to the guidance of Providence by the hands of their superiors, wish to live according to their own prudence and wisdom, and are as concerned about themselves as if they had no one to care for them. They withdraw from Thy sweet and infallible Providence by which they would have been directed most surely and most meritoriously to their eternal salvation. For there are various modes in Thy Providence and dififerent orders of governments and graces which are adapted to each individual and designed for each one's salvation. Happy the one to whom Thou appliest that order of providence and that mode of government which Thou knowest to be for him most salutary and most productive of merits. There is nothing more desirable in this world, nothing more replete with happiness than to pass through the whole course of one's life in conformity with such an arrangement and under such a guidance, because from it proceed an assurance of salvation and an assistance for eternal glory.

For religious there is no form of government more salutary that that in which Thy Providence conducts them during life by the hands of superiors, in the functions, missions, residences, studies and indeed in everything else to which they are assigned. Otherwise why should the Holy Fathers lavish such praise on perfect and blind obedience? Why should so many holy and learned personages practise it so strictly? Why should they proclaim that it is the surest way to salvation? Why should Our Lord Himself have so recommended and counselled it and in so many ways have set us an example of this obedience?

There is no possible doubt that he who abandons himself to Divine Providence and who, so to speak, casts himself in its arms, and permits himself to be governed by it in all things, is following the surest road to salvation; whereas one who does otherwise and wishes to withdraw from it and to govern himself by his own wisdom is exposing himself to a great danger of falling into the order of that providence in which he will suffer the loss of his soul. Such a manner of life is condemned by all the saints and is considered as imperilling one's salvation, no matter how holy and salutary it may appear. Examples are not wanting of religious who have perished in that way, but there is no instance of any religious who was lost by abandoning himself to Divine Providence as expressed to him by his

Superiors, or even of his being worse off for so doing. For how O Lord! could one do better than to yield to what Thou persuadest him to do? Hast Thou not bound Thyself by promise to lead us to salvation? Let me therefore never wander away, but keep me until my last breath in that path which in preference to all others Thou, O my God! and all Thy saints have commended to me.

Never is Thy Providence deceived in what it ordains; for before it determines, it knows what will happen in each supposition and in each disposition of events. It is never foiled in its effect, or in the advantage that is obtainable. For though the order of inferior causes which are only imitations of Thy Divine Providence may go awry on account of the shiftings and imperfections of such an order, so that the end it aims at is not reached, yet the order and arrangements of Thy sublime Providence never fail of their proper and determined purpose, but invariably attain it. It is true that in the present life, and as long as the term to which all those things tend is not reached, this may not appear. But when this world finally ends and the whirl of human things stops for ever, then the strength of God's Providence will manifest itself; then all the mischances of inferior causes will be seen to have been corrected, and everything established in the unchanging and eternal order. Then shall we see clearly how wisely and sweetly this divine Providence acted in accordance with the nature of each created thing and how everything was administered in the manner that was most conducive to the divine glory and the salvation of mankind.

May this Providence which is so exalted be forever before my eyes, and let me persuade myself that whatever may come either of prosperity or adversity, is ordained by it and depends on it; that thus O my God! I may receive it as a blessing from Thy hand; for nothing is done in time which has not been for most just reasons ordained from all eternity. Let this be my consolation in the hardships of life. When my spirit is troubled and afflicted by the confusion of human things, and the disasters which fall upon the nations, upon religion and upon souls, let Thy Providence give me as my portion, serenity and peace.

Thy Providence, O God! most wisely disposes all things. It will correct perfectly all the faults of creatures and all the infractions of order, and will

subject all to an order so profound that the glory of thy Majesty will be resplendent in it and even shine with greater effulgence than if all had preserved the order which had been originally prescribed.

But abandonment to Divine Providence does not prevent the evils and disasters that fall upon our neighbor and especially such offenses as are against the divine majesty from touching us profoundly and overwhelming us with sorrow. It is the condition of this life; and moreover the law of charity should cause us to be so affected, for without this spur, we should with difficulty be urged to fly to the assistance of those who suffer. Nevertheless, in all this, one must not lose sight of moderation. When such things happen and there is no hope of preventing them and when neither our endeavors or prayers avail, it is proper to banish useless sorrow and to console ourselves, O my God! with the contemplation of Thy Providence.

Let that Providence give me confidence amid the errors of life, assurance in danger, strength in difficulties, patience in adversities, and serenity in facing what the future may have in store. Let it remove from my soul any idle anxiety, by impressing it with the firm belief that whatever happens to me, O my God! comes from the kindness and benignity of Thy Providence. At the same time let it awaken in me such attention and activity as are necessary for dealing with the affairs of life in accordance with their importance and with what my state of life requires. The government of Thy Providence, O my God! calls for our studious cooperation; but it forbids and cannot tolerate superfluous care and anxiety for the temporal concerns of this life.

May it please Thy Providence, O my God! to dispose of me and govern me till the end, as it knows it to be expedient for my salvation and Thy glory, either by prosperity or adversity, by honor or ignominy, infamy or praise, abundance or poverty, sickness or health, life or death. I except nothing, I wish to avoid nothing. It is my only desire, and one long formed in my heart. Dispose of me as Thou knowest to be most conducive to my salvation and Thy glory, in order that, O my God! I may contemplate Thee and admire Thee during all eternity, that I may love Thee, that I may honor Thee, that I may praise Thee, bless Thee and glorify Thee in all things and above all things. Amen.

The Mercy of God

"I shall sing forever the mercies of God, His great, His prodigious, His ancient and His new mercies, whose number is without end"; for "the earth is full of the mercy of God and His mercy is above all His works." (Psalm 88 and 32)

O my Lord and my God! Thy hand has taken us in the beginning from the darkness of nothingness and lifted us into the light of being, giving us our species and an exalted and imperishable nature sealed with the light of Thy countenance and adorned with magnificent gifts that we might have some appreciation and knowledge of Thee and Thy bounty. Thou hast endowed our senses with such power that we can discern and begin to understand the whole material world and all that is contained in it, and we may perceive the evidence of Thy power, of Thy wisdom and of Thy beauty which shine in it so marvellously. Thou hast endowed us with understanding and judgment, to know truth, to distinguish good from evil and to rise from sensible to intellectual things. Thou hast given us memory to recall the past so that what was once perceived might not float away and compel us to labor anew in order to understand. Thou hast armed us with a will to avoid evil and to follow what is right, to enjoy what we attain, and above all to cleave to Thee by love, and to enjoy Thee our greatest good forever. Of what pertains to the body we need not speak.

Behold to what a height Thou hast made us rise! Behold the first benefits of Thy mercy. They are many, they are inestimable and yet they are but the essays, the outlines of far greater blessings still. Thy lavish benignity did not halt there. It has gone farther yet to perfect its work and to eradicate from our souls the slightest imperfection. To this elevation it has added a second; it has raised us to another degree more eminent than the first, for it has lifted us from the state of nature to that of grace and of filiation which is incomparably more exalted, no matter how perfect and sublime our nature may be. And the reason is that such an honor can be neither the natural appanage even of the most perfect creature, nor be due to any natural dignity with which it is endowed. For no created being can of its nature be a son of God, heir to His kingdom, and the possessor of the Holy Ghost. Yet

such prerogatives have been accorded to us by the out-pouring of Thy second mercy. In this degree, Thou hast made us the sharers of Thy secrets. Thou hast made us know the mysteries hidden in Thee from all eternity; Thou hast united us to Thee by supernatural faith, hope and charity, and hast lifted us above all created things. With all human beings it is reckoned among the greatest dignities to be the son of a king. Such a title confers on a man, even if he is personally of little worth, honor and respect, and the whole world proclaims him happy. But how far beyond that is the dignity of one who is a son of God, and an heir to the heavenly kingdom? In the entire universe could there be anything more sublime? It makes us venerable even in the eyes of the angels; and if they themselves were not elevated to the same dignity they might be envious of the honor conferred on us. Hence it is that a single just man who fears God is better in the estimation of God than a thousand who are wicked. (Sirach 16) Whosoever therefore has not this dignity of the sonship of God counts for nothing even if he is endowed with all the gifts and favors of nature.

But the liberality of Thy mercy is not confined within these limits. It has raised man to a third state which is most sublime. It has made him ascend from the state of grace and of initial sonship to that of glory and complete filiation. For the gifts of glory are infinitely more excellent than those of grace. The latter Thou accordest in this life, but the knowledge they give is of faith and consequently obscure, but in the light of glory we are endowed with clearness of vision. In one there is the hope and desire of the supreme good; in the other there is possession; in the one fear and apprehension, in the other certainty; in the one expectation, in the other enjoyment; in one battle, in the other victory. Although here below we are really children of God and have a right to the kingdom, nevertheless we do not yet possess it, are not altogether sure of it, and many lose it. For we are not yet free from the miseries of our mortal life; darkness and ignorance still cloud our mind, and our inclination to evil is not irrevocably corrected by the inflexible rule of right. Hence the state of glory is incomparably more excellent and sublime than the state of grace of the present life. To be convinced of it a study of the good that is bestowed on us by each of these states will be amply sufficient.

This, O God, is the third and noblest elevation of our nature; the supreme degree in the communication of Thy gifts. From it are excluded every misery and every imperfection. It is to this sublime degree that the immeasurable sweetness of Thy mercy has destined us in order that in it our mortality may be absorbed, all suffering cease, all want and all imperfection banished, all sorrows assuaged, and every tear wiped away. In order that we, Thy children, O my God, may be made sharers in Thy possessions and riches, we are established in consummated glory. "All things for the elect." That is to say, all things were ordained with a view to bring as many as possible to the glory and participation of the kingdom of heaven.

But after having been elevated to this second degree, instead of making every effort to rise to the third, although we had every help at hand, and could do so with the greatest ease and the greatest joy, yet alas! because of the shameful act of our first father who had, so to speak, the will of all of us included in his own, we withdrew from the order and guidance of Thy mercy, and as a consequence turned away from Thee and plunged into everlasting ruin. Surely it would have been better to have fallen into our primitive nothingness than to have been condemned to eternal fire which was then inevitable. No remedy was left us; no creature could avail to help, for none could offer to Thy justice a proportionate satisfaction for our crime. It seemed all over with our race, and there was no hope of salvation, when Thou, O God of mercy! touched by our misfortune, didst come again to our aid in such a marvellous and unheard of way that it ought to be for us an eternal subject of wonder. In the excess of Thy love Thou didst vouchsafe that Thy Son who is coeternal and consubstantial with Thee should assume our nature, in order that being a man like us and capable of suffering, He would make reparation for our crime, and in our stead satisfy Thy divine justice by His sufferings and His death.

Taking our nature upon Himself and uniting it to Him by the ineffable bond of the Personal Union, this well-beloved Son is born of a Virgin and enters into the darkness of the world in which He is to be subjected to the miseries of our mortality, such as hunger and thirst, heat and cold, poverty and want, labor and fatigue, outrages and affronts, persecution and calumny, bitterness of soul and torture of body, and finally the cross and death. He is born in a stable like a beggar and a wanderer; He is wrapped in swaddling clothes as

an infant; He weeps as mortals weep; He is circumcised as if He were subject to the law; He takes to flight as if He were without power; He lives as if He were unknown; He obeys His parents as if He were their inferior; He lives as an ordinary man until the time came in which He was to manifest Himself. He is baptized by His servant as if He were a sinner; He fasts in the desert; He is tempted by the devil; He chooses ignorant and rude disciples; He instructs them and leads them step by step in the way of perfection. He journeys over the whole country with them; He teaches the people the way of salvation; He heals the sick, consoles the afflicted, delivers the possessed; sanctifies sinners, dispels the darkness of ignorance, illumines the world, astounds it by miracles, permits some gleams of His Divinity to flash upon men's eyes and exhorts all to reform their life and to be solicitous about their salvation.

Finally after having taught a heavenly doctrine, after having wrought many miracles and given examples of every virtue, He then, in order to consummate the work of our redemption, delivers Himself up entirely as our ransom, and submitting to a most ignominious and cruel death offers His life and His blood for our salvation.

O ineffable mercy! How little right the human race had to it! O pure and gratuitous love! O unhoped for condescension! that the King of Glory should deign to take the form of a slave, give Himself up to such labor and suffering, and finally accept the death of the cross to save not only the vilest of slaves but His bitterest enemies! Was there ever a father who for the deliverance of his son, or a son for the deliverance of his father, or friend for that of his friend, would have done what God has done for man; the Creator for a creature, the Sovereign Majesty for a worm of the earth?

But His mercy did not stop there. All that He did and suffered for us, all the merits of His life He grouped together and left to us in the sacraments as an inexhaustible treasure from which we might forever draw.

O admirable treasure! O infinite riches by which we may ransom ourselves from eternal death, acquire the kingdom and glory of heaven and gain the possession of God! Finally, to leave nothing undone that His infinite love could accomplish, and to give us a supreme pledge of that love. He left us His Flesh and Blood which He had offered on the cross for our redemption

and made them a sacrifice to appease the justice of God, and a food to fortify us for eternal life.

By this act of mercy, O Lord! Thou hast conquered. It alone rises above all that Thou hast done, above all that mind could conceive or creatures hope for. Who that thinks of it can fail to love Thee? Who would not be ready to devote himself and be utterly spent in laboring for Thine honor and Thy service, since in so many ways Thou hast spent Thyself and more than spent Thyself for our salvation. What are our services compared with the benefits Thou hast conferred on us? And what is our life when measured by what Thou hast done and suffered for us? It is a drop of water to the ocean; a grain of dust to the terrestrial globe. It is far less than all that, for there can be no comparison between the finite and the infinite. What then shall we offer Thee, since the consecration of our life and of all we have is already due Thee under a multitude of titles? If one should owe a prince ten thousand talents that were stolen, and ten thousand more that were borrowed, and another ten thousand for an injury done, and another ten thousand for something bought, and yet had only two small coins to pay it all would the prince be satisfied with such a settlement? Never.

But Thou, O my God! carriest Thy goodness and mercy farther. For although we are in so many ways and to such an extent Thy debtors yet as soon as we employ the two pieces of money that we have: our soul and body, Thou art satisfied and exactest no more. And yet even in that we afford no benefit to Thee but are serving our own interests. For to serve Thee is to reign, and if we gave Thee all that we have and consecrated ourselves absolutely to Thy service, and had never a thought but of Thee, we would be securing the greatest possible advantage for ourselves.

Woe to those whose blindness prevents them from seeing these marvels! Illumine my darkness, O God of Light! that I may know the magnitude of Thy mercies and the multitudinous evidences of Thy love, and after having seen that Light, let me esteem and appreciate it at its proper value, as far as the darkness of this life may permit. May the vision of these things be ever present to me, in order that my soul, amazed and enraptured by so much benignity and by so many benefits, may be inflamed with the fire of Thy love and devote and consecrate itself entirely to Thee. May all my thoughts,

may all the powers of my being, may all my preoccupations and all the actions of my life be for Thy glory. May all the strength of my body and soul be spent in Thy service so that I, even I, may offer something to Thy love and be found not altogether ungrateful in Thy divine presence.

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and let all that is within me bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and never forget all that He hath done for thee. He forgiveth all thy iniquities; healeth all thy diseases; redeemeth thy life from destruction; crowneth thee with mercy and compassion; and satisfieth thy desires with good things. Thy youth shall be renewed like the eagles." (Psalm 102)

And do ye also O Angels, Archangels, Principalities, Virtues, Dominations, Thrones, Cherubim and Seraphim bless the Lord! Bless Him, unite your praise and exalt Him, because He has exercised His mercy towards us. May the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that is in them, praise and exalt forever the greatness of His name. To Him be honor and praise and thanksgiving from every generation, for ever and ever. Amen.

The Justice of God

"Who knoweth the power of Thy wrath? What terror will measure Thy vengeance?" (Psalm 89) Who can properly appreciate the magnitude and the multitude of the punishments Thou hast prepared for sinners to be meted out to them by Thine omnipotence in due time? As Thy mercy is infinite so is Thy justice. It shows itself in numberless ways against sinners, not only in the future but in the present life; and although now mercy is chiefly exercised, nevertheless justice is at times exacted, so that men may learn to fear Thee. If sweetness does not avail to touch their hearts, the severity of Thy judgments may strike them with alarm.

Thou didst manifest Thy justice and Thine anger against sin when for a single transgression Thou didst precipitate myriads of angels into hell though they were incomparably superior to men, and didst condemn them to eternal torment without any hope of pardon. Nor was Thy justice stayed either by the vast number of those who were punished, or by the excellence and beauty of their nature, or by their marvellous intelligence endowed though it was with such clear and penetrating knowledge. Thou didst not take into account the praise and benediction and gratitude and honor and glory that Thou wouldst have received from them for all eternity if Thou hadst pardoned their sin. Notwithstanding the loss of this masterpiece of Thy hands and the glory it would have procured for Thee hadst Thou forgiven it, Thou didst prefer to suffer such a loss rather than pardon that single sin.

Thou didst again display Thy justice and Thy wrath against sin in the punishment of our first parents, not only by depriving the whole human race of its original justice and the happiness of the state in which Thou didst create it, but by condemning it to innumerable miseries and to death itself. Thy wisdom foresaw that in consequence of this punishment an infinite multitude of men would be lost and that scarcely one out of a hundred would be saved, and yet on account of this first sin of our parents. Thou didst permit all that to fall on their posterity. Who is not startled when standing before this abyss of Thy judgments? Verily Thou art the great and terrible God, infinitely exalted and super-exalted above all creatures, all-

sufficing of Thyself for all praise and glory and happiness, and needing neither our service nor our praise, nor the service of the angels, but requiring only one thing: obedience to Thy will.

Thou didst also show Thine anger against sinners when in punishment of a deluge of sin, Thou didst send the deluge of the waters which destroyed the whole human race with the exception of eight who were to repeople the world. Thus didst Thou purify the earth which had been made foul with crime. Thy wrath again shone forth when a rain of fire and brimstone poured down from the heavens and utterly destroyed Sodom and the adjoining cities with all who dwelt therein, thus giving even in this life an image of the eternal fire prepared for sinners after death.

Four hundred years afterwards. Thy wrath was exercised against the Egyptians who were oppressing Thy people by a cruel and unjust slavery. When both prince and people persisted in their obstinancy in spite of the mysterious and terrible plagues with which they were stricken, Thou didst make the waters of the Red Sea to engulf them.

Thou didst not even spare Thy people whom Thou hadst chosen from all the nations of the world. In pursuance of Thy mandate, the earth opened under the feet of those who rebelled, fire falling from heaven consumed them, and the sword exterminated them. For their sin of murmuring they were condemned to wander for forty years in the barren sands and frightful solitudes of the desert; and finally during the time of the Judges, Thou didst permit them on account of their sins to be six times vanquished by their enemies, dragged into slavery and subjected to every kind of misfortune.

Finally to punish its sins Thou hast often chastised the human race by pestilence, famine, war, tempests, floods and earthquakes. For as there is no place where sin is not committed, it is just that in all places sinners should be scourged by suffering in order that smitten by Thy hand they may return to the ways of wisdom and fulfil their duty to Thee.

Thou punishest sin not only by exterior calamities, but still more by those which are interior and spiritual, as when Thou withdrawest from sinners Thy light and the protection of Thy grace, and permittest them to be driven by the demon into all kinds of wickedness. That is one of the most dreadful

chastisements because it is next to eternal damnation. Thus for many thousands of years Thou didst permit the Gentiles, that is to say, almost the whole world, to enter upon the paths of iniquity, and didst allow the devil as the prince and god of this world to occupy Thy kingdom, and to be honored and adored by men as a veritable deity. In the same way Thou didst cast away Thy people on account of their crimes. Because they rejected the love of truth and put Truth itself to death Thou didst reject them by the withdrawal of Thy grace, and didst permit the demons to hold them enthralled in the slavery of intellectual blindness and error. Thus also because of their crimes and chiefly because of their heresies Thou didst abandon several Christian realms and didst deliver them over to infidels or devils.

Such are the judgments of Thy justice; such are the wages meted out to the wicked for their desertion of God. Those who abandon Thee and Thy doctrine are abandoned by Thee, and delivered over to the deceits of the devil so that they mistake light for darkness and darkness for light, rejecting good as if it were evil and embracing the greatest evil as if it were the greatest good. Yet although this is the most awful punishment that can be inflicted in the present life, nevertheless as it is not visible and not felt, no attention is paid to it, and instead of being regarded as a chastisement, it is esteemed as a benefit. But that is only a proof of the extremity of the misfortune.

It is by these and other punishments that Thou afflictest sinners in this life and showest Thy wrath and Thy justice. But who can explain the sufferings, the afflictions, and the miseries that Thou hast reserved for sinners in the life to come, when Thou loosenest the reins of Thine anger, and no longer restrainest it by Thy mercy. There are they imprisoned in the deepest dungeon where everything inspires horror: there they are plunged in a pool of fire and brimstone; there the heaped up bodies will burn as dry wood in the midst of the sulphurous lake; there, will be weeping and gnashing of teeth because of the fierceness of the suffering inflicted and the inability to support it; there under the form of frightful monsters, the demons enwrapped in a. body of fire will exercise their cruelty on the unfortunate damned; there will be felt in the body the extremest pain, and in all the senses extremest agony; there the soul will be overwhelmed by

incomprehensible sadness and incomprehensible despair, when it considers the infinite loss that it has suffered, the awfulness of its misfortunes, and above all the eternity during which all these losses and all these woes will be suffered without the shadow of any alleviation or appeasement of pain. O Eternity! Infinite good for the blessed; infinite evil for the reprobate! What a dreadful excess of pain, what horrible and intolerable torture it would be to burn in a blazing furnace even for a day. What would it be for a year or a hundred years; or a thousand years; or a hundred thousand years! What horror would seize our soul if we were condemned to burn for a hundred thousand years! But if it is for all eternity, the punishment becomes infinitely greater and infinitely worse and engenders in the soul an agony incomparably more appalling. What then must that suffering be in itself which is incomparably greater than a hundred thousand years in the torture of fire?

Who can meditate on these sufferings without a shudder? To avoid them and to reach a place where they are no longer possible who would not despise from the depths of his soul the riches, pleasures and honors of this world? Who would not enter upon the narrow path of salvation? Who would not consider it as the uttermost limit of madness, to expose himself for earthly and passing things to the danger of measureless and everlasting woe?

I beg Thee, O Lord, by Thine infinite goodness and mercy, by the merits and mysteries of Thy Sacred Humanity to preserve me from such madness. Illumine my mind with Thy light and the salutary wisdom of the elect, that by its fire, I may know more clearly the grievousness of sin which deserves such frightful punishments. Make me often consider, O my God, with all the strength of mind the misfortune of the lost; let me thoroughly understand for the sake of my salvation what a boundless ocean of malice there is in each deadly sin, that overwhelms both soul and body in such an ocean of misery; and finally, let me endeavor with all possible care to avoid it, and to strive to please Thee. It is thus that I shall flee from the greatest evil and labor efficaciously for the greatest good.

God Our Last End

"O ye sons of men, how long will you be dull of heart? Why do you love vanity and seek after lying?" (Psalm 4) The honors, riches and pleasures you seek so ardently are all vanity. Yet to obtain them you employ all the resources of your soul by which you could have attained solid and everlasting happiness.

"Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity," says Ecclesiastes, and he had tried everything and in the light of the highest intelligence had contemplated everything. Rightly he calls them *vanity* because they are of no avail for the end we have been appointed to reach, and they are often an obstacle. They are *lies* for they promise happiness and bring only misery. Those who seek such things are truly described as the *sons of men* for their minds are blinded, their cupidity is senseless and their labor useless and pernicious. Not for such things have we been created and placed in the world; not in them is good or rest to be found. They are earthly and fleeting and can neither perfect nor satisfy the soul whose nature is heavenly and eternal, whose capacity is boundless and whose dignity is next to that of the angels.

What then is our real good? Listen to the Royal Prophet who asks: "Who showeth us good things? The light of Thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us. Thou hast given gladness in our heart." (Psalm 4) The light of faith can show us this good and the way to reach it, and the knowledge of it fills the heart with incredible joy. For what is more desirable than to know our sovereign good and our last end, and to be surely treading the pathway that conducts us to eternal life. Without that knowledge all other knowledge is useless and deserves not the name of wisdom.

The ancient philosophers lacked that knowledge and hence they were dissipated in their thoughts and drew no profit from their labors and researches. "For who knoweth the thoughts of God if it be not the Spirit of God, for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God (I Corinthians 2)? By the Spirit has this hidden counsel of God been revealed to us. "May the heavens and the earth and the sea and all they contain, bless Thee, O my God! may they praise and exalt Thee for ever and ever."

(Daniel 3) For before all ages we were Thy care, and in the first counsel of Thy Trinity Thou didst form in our regard a design of infinite benignity. It was to make us sharers in Thy divinity and in all Thy possessions and in all Thy joy. Who would not be ravished with astonishment in contemplating such benignity and sweetness? Who would have ever been able to hope for or divine it? But such was the pleasure of Thine infinite goodness whose nature is to pour itself out and communicate itself in ineffable ways.

Alone in Thine eternity Thou wert in the enjoyment of Thine own goodness, and lacking nothing, for Thou art the infinite good and most sufficient for all happiness. The delight of the sweetness of association and friendship was not wanting. Thou didst find it in the Trinity of Persons; for between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit there exists a sovereign society, a sovereign love, a sovereign communication of all good, of all joys, of all thoughts. Thou didst not therefore need the society of creatures. That could not be of advantage to Thee. Yet nevertheless yielding to the inclination of Thy goodness, Thou didst wish to create us and to elevate us to the participation of Thy possessions and of Thine infinite felicity.

Between Thee and us there is an infinite distance not of place but of nature. Being infinitely exalted above all creatures, Thou rulest them from an infinite height. Between us and Thee are the infinite degrees of rational nature which Thou in Thine infinite wisdom and power dost keep as Thou hast disposed them. Yet nevertheless the power of Thy goodness is so great, that Thou canst elevate our soul above all created beings and, above all that may be created, in a most wonderful manner without assistance unite us to Thee by vision, by love and by beatitude.

O admirable, happy and glorious union in which, O my God, are found at the same time our greatest good and Thy greatest glory! For by it we are made sharers in the divine goodness and the divine joy; and by it Thy Divinity shines in greatest splendor outside of Itself in the mirror of the created spirit, as within. It shines in the contemplation of Itself. In other created things, as in the structure of this universe and the different degrees of being, there are without doubt certain feeble rays of Thy Divinity, by the help of which we somewhat surmise Thy power. Thy wisdom. Thy goodness; but in our soul thus elevated and united to Thee the whole

plenitude of Thy Divinity glows in Its splendor, and in It Thy beauty is reflected. And although It is one. It is nevertheless multiplied in such a marvellous manner that there would seem to be as many divinities as there are blessed spirits.

That union of our soul with God is made the supreme aim of our desires. By it all good flows to us: power, because we shall be kings and sons of God; wisdom, for we shall possess and contemplate the very source of wisdom; holiness, for that burning love with which we shall be inflamed is supreme holiness and the perfection of every virtue; riches, because the kingdom of heaven and all its wealth belongs to us; honors, because we shall be received and honored as sons of God; beauty, because our body shall shine as the sun and our soul like the Divinity; joys and delights, for we "shall be inebriated with the plenty of Thy house and shall drink of the torrent of Thy pleasure" (Psalm 35); peace and security, for nothing without or within can ever trouble or sadden or disturb us; and what is greatest of all, there is the absolute certainty that this union with God will be eternal.

Therefore let this union in which are found our greatest good, and God’s greatest glory be ever nearest to our heart. Let us long for it and let us place it above all created things. Let the possessions of this life, no matter how great they may appear, become vile in comparison with it, and let all else without exception be reputed as nothing. Let all our thoughts, our cares, our labors tend to that divine union and let our soul never know rest except in it.

But as so great a good is far beyond our strength, we have recourse to Thee, O most benignant God! It is solely by Thine infinite bounty that from all eternity Thou hast destined us to that sublime state. To conduct us thither and to put us in possession of it. Thou hast created the world, assumed our flesh, died on the cross, and given us other innumerable testimonies of Thy love. Continue Thy benignity towards us; interrupt it not, nor diminish it because of our ingratitude, our negligences, and the other blots that are the sad consequences of our frailty. Augment it rather, being mindful of Thine eternal purpose and of all the mercies Thou hast heaped upon us to this day. Illumine our souls with the light of Thy Holy Spirit; let it make us know the vanities and perils of this world, by the deceits of which so many perish, and let it reveal to us the excellence and the holiness of the eternal good that

Thou hast prepared for us in Thee. Keep all this ever before our eyes and let it exercise on our souls a profound impression which will urge us in spite of all transitory things to the love and the conquest of all that is eternal. Let our desires, and our longing never cease; let our efforts ever increase until the last moment of our life; and then by Thy grace, make us be found worthy of Thy kingdom and of the eternal rest in which all the saints, united with Thee who art their last end and sovereign good, will find by the vision and by love, unutterable delights and the supreme accomplishment of all their desires.

About This EBook

The text of this ebook is taken from the book *The Names of God and Meditative Summaries of the Divine Perfections* by Venerable Leonard Lessius, S.J. The edition used was translated to English by Father T J Campbell, S.J., and published by The America Press of New York, New York in 1912.

It has the Imprimi potest of Father Anthony J Maas, S.J., Provincial, Maryland-New York Province; the Nihil obstat of Father Remegius Lafort, Censor; and the Imprimatur of Cardinal John Murphy Farley, Archdiocese of New York, New York, 6 December 1912.

The cover image is the oil painting *Saint Francis in Meditation* by Lodovico Carracci, c.1583. The painting is in the Dulwich Picture Gallery in London, England, and the image was swiped from Wikimedia Commons.

For more free ebooks, other material by or about thousands of saints, beati, venerables, servants of God, devotions, or the history of the Church, come see us at -

CatholicSaints.Info

** or **

CatholicSaints.Mobi